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SUBJECT: JAPANESE VIEWS OF RAZALI'S MISSION

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez. Reason: 1.5 (d).

¶11. (C) Summary: According to Japanese Embassy sources in Rangoon, at the upcoming UN meetings in Tokyo, Japan will argue that the current sanctions-based western approach to Burma has failed and should be revised to allow for a more gradual process of transition, more direct aid support and more dialogue with regional states regarding the implications of change in Burma. The Japanese Ambassador to Burma, Yuji Miyamoto, has taken the lead on formulating this approach and will likely be the prime GOJ spokesman at the meetings. End Summary.

¶12. (C) The GOJ believes that the Razali process will have to be reformulated before it can make any further progress in Burma. According to the Japanese Embassy's Political Counselor, Rokuichiro Michii, the GOJ, led by Ambassador Miyamoto, has reached a number of conclusions in recent weeks. First, the GOJ believes that Than Shwe has emerged as the single important decision-maker in the GOB; "everything," according to Michii, "centered on him." Secondly, there was now little pressure for change in Burma. While Burma's economic situation was problematic, the problems were not serious enough to force change. Similarly, Western ties with Burma were now minimal and Western sanctions ineffectual, given the absolute absence of front line state support for sanctions. India, China, Thailand and all other regional states were now all engaged with the GOB, Michii noted; none were prepared to put their relations with Burma at risk for the sake of political change. On the contrary, all now effectively provided a cushion of support for the GOB in the face of western sanctions.

¶13. (C) The GOJ also believed that no confidence had been re-established between the GOB and the NLD, despite two years of talks. While the SPDC had made "tactical concessions," there were "no incentives" for it to change, Michii said. Meanwhile, there were many "risks" to embarking on a course of political change while active insurgencies continued in the countryside. As for the NLD, it too feared to compromise, according to Michii. Aung San Suu Kyi's release in May had created high expectations, which could backfire on the party if the NLD settled for anything less than a full participatory democracy. On the other hand, the NLD also knew the risks of trying to force the pace of change. In 1990 and 1998, it had been the victim of government crackdowns and did not want to go that route again. Hence, it had settled for an ineffectual middle course -- demanding change, but doing nothing directly to press the government towards change.

The Problems

¶14. (C) As for UN Special Envoy Razali, Michii said, Japan supported him and his efforts. It also believed that Razali's "facilitation" had produced some results; e.g., the release of political prisoners and some additional political space for the NLD. However, there were problems with the current process. First of all, Razali did not enjoy full international support. By and large, regional states, including front line states like India, China and Thailand, viewed Razali's mission as a western initiative meant to serve western interests in human rights even at the expense of issues of high interest to regional states like narcotics control, refugees, and regional development. Those states might give lip service to Razali's efforts, but none were prepared to sacrifice their relations with Burma for the sake of his program. Secondly, Razali had set his sights too high, according to Michii. Given adequate incentives, the GOB might sign on for some process leading to a "guided democracy;" however, it would not accept the full participatory democracy that the West, following the NLD, was now demanding. Finally, the GOJ felt that the international community had used only "sticks and no carrots" in dealing with the SPDC. It had not toned down its rhetoric and had not delivered on promises of support even for humanitarian issues.

Japanese Proposals

¶15. (C) To deal with these problems, the GOJ plans to recommend in Tokyo that the international community take steps to make Razali's mission relevant to, or at least

compatible with, regional interests. In its view, if we continue as we are today, with western states headed in one direction and regional states in another, then the chances for any successful internationally led effort at change will be small. Secondly, the Japanese will argue that the West should be realistic regarding its expectations for change. The NLD might be constrained regarding the types of change it could advocate, but the West need not remain locked in that same box. If a slower, but ultimately more promising process could be worked out, then that is the direction in which we should move with or without an explicit endorsement from the NLD. Finally, if the West truly wanted the Razali process to work, it had to be more generous, Michii said. Right now, the west was advocating radical change without providing any restructuring support. Not unreasonably, the GOB and most regional governments questioned the wisdom of that approach in a country with such deeply-rooted problems.

Comment

16. (C) The analysis above is not new, but it is accurate. There is little pressure for change or inclination towards compromise in Burma now. The economy is faltering, but not so badly as to completely undermine the government's hold on power. Western sanctions hurt, but not enough to threaten the government. Meanwhile, those same sanctions alienate regional states, who feel that the West has placed its interest in human rights before their interest in regional stability and regional development. As a result, the West has ended up trying to run a blockade without front-line state support. Not surprisingly, that approach has failed.

17. (C) Whether anything else is possible is the real question. The prescription the Japanese plan to offer fits the diagnosis, but they will need the bedside manner of saints to make that prescription go down with Western governments. More dialogue with regional states regarding the regional implications of change in Burma, more realistic goals for the process of transition and more direct aid support for change could all help the transition process. When all is said and done, however, the GOJ will essentially be asking the West to distinguish its political goals from those of the Burmese domestic political opposition led by Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD. The Japanese may be right in arguing that the NLD is trapped by the current configuration of political forces into taking a maximalist position. Unfortunately, they may find that the West as a whole is in exactly the same position.

18. (C) In any case, USG representatives should be prepared to react to the Japanese analysis and presentation in Tokyo. From what we understand, this position has been well vetted within the GOJ and could determine Japanese policy in Burma for some time to come, regardless of any decisions taken at the coming meeting. End Comment.

Martinez